



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **CREW CONVICTED OF SMUGGLING EIGHT TONS OF COCAINE**

TAMPA - This week a federal jury convicted six defendants arrested aboard the Colombian F/V Recuerdo of cocaine-related charges. In August 2001, the entire ten man crew was detained by the United States Coast Guard in the eastern Pacific Ocean after more than eight and one-half tons of cocaine were discovered hidden in the vessel. The defendants were initially brought to Jacksonville, Florida and transferred to Tampa to stand trial on federal narcotics charges.

Four of the crew pled guilty prior to trial. On Wednesday, the remaining six defendants were convicted after a four-day trial, which included testimony from the Coast Guard boarding team and several cooperating crew members. Convicted of possession with intent to distribute cocaine while aboard a vessel subject to United States jurisdiction were: Alvaro Bolanos-Munoz, Jose Nieves Quinones-Gruesso, Rodrigo Bolanos-Munoz, Indulfo Pandales-Angulo, Rigoberto Garcia-Gonzalez and Ezequiel Valencia-Criollo. Alvaro Bolanos-Munoz, Rodrigo Bolanos-Munoz, Indulfo Pandales-Angulo, Rigoberto

Garcia-Gonzalez and Ezequiel Valencia-Criollon were convicted of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine while aboard a vessel subject to United States jurisdiction. Each defendant faces a minimum mandatory sentence of ten years' imprisonment and a potential sentence of up to life imprisonment. No sentencing date has been set.

The case is part of an ongoing investigation, Panama Express, in the Middle District of Florida by the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force. The participating agencies include the United States Navy; United States Coast Guard; Joint Interagency Task Force; Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); United States Customs Service; and the United States Marshal service. United States Attorney Paul I. Perez praised the various agencies for their continued cooperation, and stated, "We will continue to focus on stopping illegal drugs long before they reach the street corners of America." The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Joseph K. Ruddy of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force for the Middle District of Florida.